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Address of Gen. Joshua L. Chamberlain at the Dedication of the Maine Monuments on the Battlefield of Gettysburg

Joshua L. Chamberlain

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Battlefield of Gettysburg

**General Chamberlain's
Address**

October 3, 1893

*Miss M. Farrington
Brewer, Maine*

ADDRESS

OF

GEN. JOSHUA L. CHAMBERLAIN

AT THE

DEDICATION

OF

THE MAINE MONUMENTS

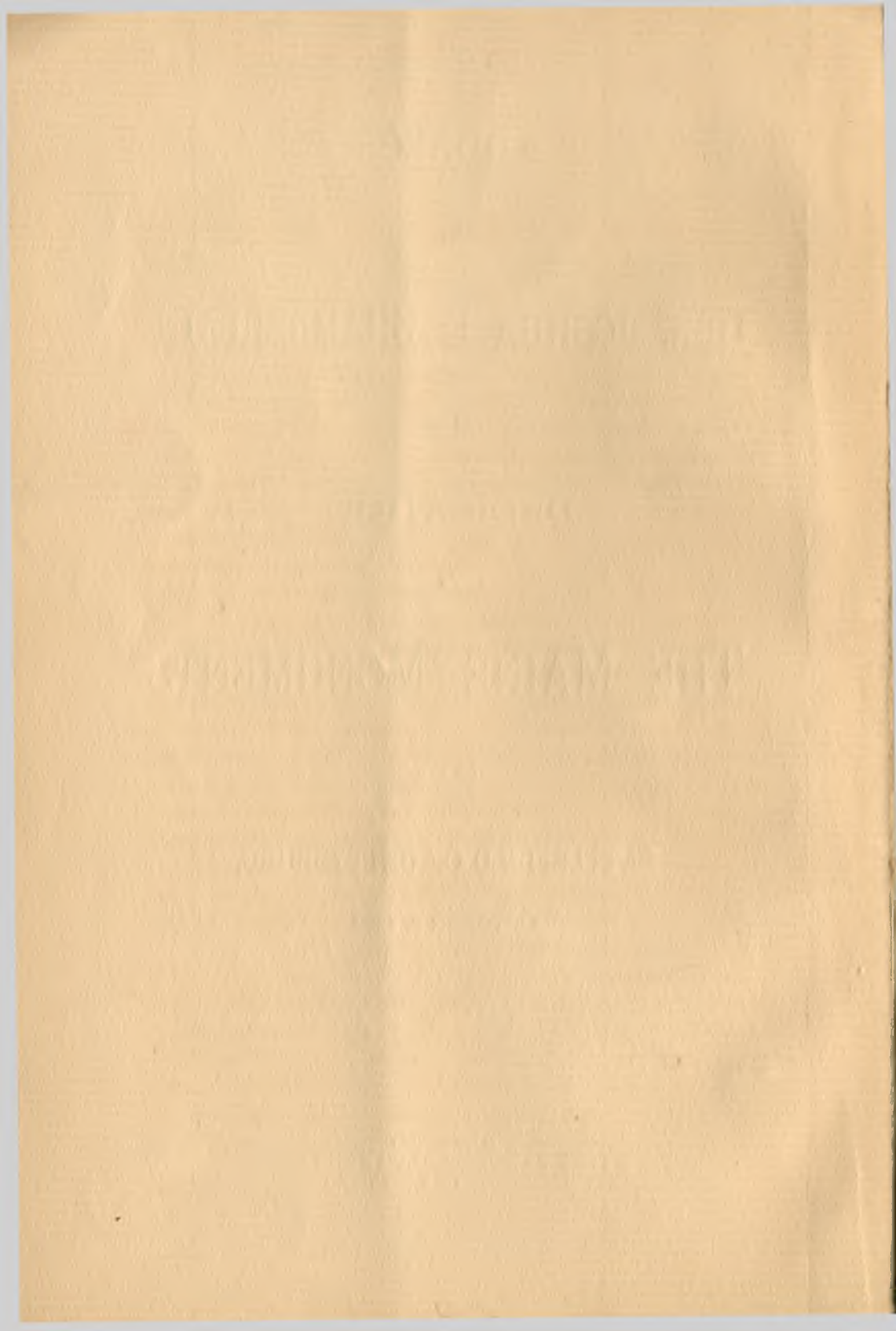
ON THE

BATTLEFIELD OF GETTYSBURG,

OCTOBER 3, 1893



AUGUSTA:
MAINE FARMERS' ALMANAC PRESS
1895



GENERAL CHAMBERLAIN'S ADDRESS.

The State of Maine stands here to-day for the first time in her own name. In other days she was here indeed — here in power — here in majesty — here in glory ; but as elsewhere and often in the centuries before, with that humility which is perhaps the necessary law of human exaltation, her worth merged in a name mightier than her own, so here, content to be part of that greater being that she held dearer than self, but which was made more worthy of honor by her belonging to it — the United States of America. For which great end, in every heroic struggle from the beginning of our history until now,— a space of more than two hundred years,— she has given her best of heart and brain and poured out her most precious blood.

To-day she stands here, in a service of mingled recognitions ; humbly submitting to that mysterious law of sacrifice and suffering for the deliverance from evil ; bending sorrowfully above the dust to which have returned again the priceless jewels offered from her bosom ; proud that it was her part and lot that what was best in her giving and what was immortal in her loss should be builded into the nation's weal ; and stretching out her hand, of justice and of grace, to raise along these silent lines of battle monuments eloquent of her costly devotion and of the great reward. She stands here — not ashamed when the roll of honor is called, to speak her own name, and answer, Here !

The organization of the army of the Union was a counterpart of that of the Union itself. In its ultimate elements and separate units of organization, the personal force and political authority of each State were present ; but they were merged and mingled in another order, which took another and higher name when exercised jointly, in a single aim, for the common weal. For reasons various but valid, the regiments and batteries of

the several States were, for the most part, separated in assignment, distributed to different brigades, divisions, corps, armies. Some sad suggestions there were among these reasons; for one, the care that in some great disaster the loss might not fall too heavily on the families of one neighborhood. But there was a greater reason. Our thoughts were not then of States as States, but of the States united,—of that union and oneness in which the People of the United States lived and moved and had their being. Our hearts beat to that one high thought; our eyes saw but the old flag; and our souls saw it, glorious with the symbols of power and peace and blessing in the forward march of man.

But now that this victory is won, this cause vindicated, and the great fact of the being and authority of the People of the United States has been thus solemnly attested,—the moral forces summoning, and as it were consecrating the physical as token and instrument of their convictions,—now, the several States that stood as one in that high cause come here in their own name,—in the noblest sphere of their State rights,—to ratify and confirm this action of their delegates; to set these monuments as seals to their own great deeds, and new testament of life.

To-day we stand on an awful arena, where character which was the growth of centuries was tested and determined by the issues of a single day. We are compassed about by a cloud of witnesses; not alone the shadowy ranks of those who wrestled here, but the greater parties of the action—they for whom these things were done. Forms of thought rise before us, as in an amphitheatre, circle beyond circle, rank above rank; The State, The Union, The People. And these are One. Let us—from the arena, contemplate them—the spiritual spectators.

There is an aspect in which the question at issue might seem to be of forms, and not of substance. It was, on its face, a question of government. There was a boastful pretence that each State held in its hands the death-warrant of the Nation; that any State had a right, without show of justification outside of its own caprice, to violate the covenants of the constitution, to break away from the Union, and set up its own little sover-

eignty as sufficient for all human purposes and ends ; thus leaving it to the mere will or whim of any member of our political system to destroy the body and dissolve the soul of the Great People. This was the political question submitted to the arbitrament of arms. But the victory was of great politics over small. It was the right reason, the moral consciousness and solemn resolve of the people rectifying its wavering exterior lines according to the life-lines of its organic being.

There is a phrase abroad which obscures the legal and the moral questions involved in the issue,—indeed, which falsifies history : “The War between the States.” There are here no States outside of the Union. Resolving themselves out of it does not release them. Even were they successful in intrenching themselves in this attitude, they would only relapse into territories of the United States. Indeed several of the States so resolving were never in their own right either States or Colonies ; but their territories were purchased by the common treasury of the Union, and were admitted as States out of its grace and generosity. Underneath this phrase and title,—“The War between the States,”—lies the false assumption that our Union is but a compact of States. Were it so, neither party to it could renounce it at his own mere will or caprice. Even on this theory the States remaining true to the terms of their treaty, and loyal to its intent, would have the right to resist force by force, to take up the gage of battle thrown down by the rebellious States, and compel them to return to their duty and their allegiance. The Law of Nations would have accorded the loyal States this right and remedy.

But this was not our theory, nor our justification. The flag we bore into the field was not that of particular States, no matter how many nor how loyal, arrayed against other States. It was the flag of the Union, the flag of the people, vindicating the right and charged with the duty of preventing any factions, no matter how many nor under what pretence, from breaking up this common Country.

It was the country of the South as well as of the North. The men who sought to dismember it, belonged to it. Its was a larger

life, aloof from the dominance of self-surroundings ; but in it their truest interests were interwoven. They suffered themselves to be drawn down from the spiritual ideal by influences of the physical world. There is in man that peril of the double nature. "But I see another law," says St. Paul, "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind."

No one of us would disregard the manly qualities and earnest motives among those who permitted themselves to strike at the consecrated life of the Union, and thus made themselves our foes. But the best of virtues may be enlisted in the worst of causes. Had the question of breaking up this Union been submitted to the people of the South as American citizens, I do not believe it possible that such a resolution could have been taken. But the leaders of that false cause knew how to take advantage of instincts deeply planted in every American heart ; and by perverting their State Governments, and making their conspiracy seem to be the act and intent of the States, sprung an appeal to the sentiment of loyalty to the principle of local self-government ; and the thrilling reveille of cannon swept the heart-strings of a chivalrous and impressionable people. There are times when it is more natural to act than to reason, and easier to fight than to be right. But the men that followed that signal made a terrible mistake. Misled by fictions ; mistaught as to fact and doctrine by their masters of political history and public law ; falsely fired by misdirected sentiment ; mazed in the strange contradiction that they were at once the champions of democracy and the exponents of aristocratic superiority, they forgot the calm, true life rolling on above,—the mightier solution of differences,—the great coherence of affinity, stronger by counterpoise of attractions and interfusion of unlikenesses, than any mere aggregation of sameness of elements. They did not understand this rich, composite nature of the great People, born of the eternal energies of freedom ; incorporate under the guarantees of highest law ; dedicated to immortal life in the great covenants of mutual human faith.

There was no war between the States. It was a war in the name of certain States to destroy the political existence of the

United States, in membership of which alone, on any just theory of the government, their own sovereignty as States inhered, and could make itself effectual. To this absurd pass did that false theory come, a war of States against the people; and if successful, the suicide of States.

Our enemies, it is true, by their choice of field, secured the opportunity to say they were resisting an invader; that they were fighting for their native soil and birthright; for their homes and all that men hold dear in them. We understand the power of sentiments like these, even when abused and played upon by indirection.

The State is dear to all of us. It is the guardian of what we may call home rights; the almoner of home born charities; the circle within which likeness of material, identity of interests and sympathy of sentiment make a crystal unity. Were our own State attacked in its high place and rightful function, we should defend it as valiantly as our brethren of the South were made to think they were defending theirs. But no such assault was made. We fought against no State; but for its deliverance. We fought the enemies of our common Country, to overthrow the engines and symbols of its destruction wherever found upon its soil.

We fought no better, perhaps, than they. We exhibited, perhaps no higher individual qualities. But the cause for which we fought was higher; our thought was wider. We too were fighting for birth-right and native soil; for homes and all the sanctities of life, wide over the land, and far forward through the years to come. For all this belongs to us, and we to it. That thought was our power. We took rank by its height, and not of our individual selves.

It is something great and greatening, to cherish an ideal; to act in the light of the truth that is far-away and far above; to set aside the near advantage, the momentary pleasure; the snatching of seeming good to self, and to act for remoter ends, for higher good, and for interests other than our own.

To us this people in its life on earth was a moral personality, having a character and a commission; hence responsibility;

hence duty ; hence right, and its authority. The Union was the body of a spiritual Unity. Of this we were part,—responsible to it and for it,—and sacrifice was service.

Our personality exists in two identities,—the sphere of self, and the sphere of soul. One is circumscribed ; the other moving out on boundless trajectories ; one is near, and therefore dear ; the other far and high, and therefore great. We live in both, but most in the greatest. Men reach their completest development, not in isolation nor working within narrow bounds, but through membership and participation in life of largest scope and fulness. To work out all the worth of manhood ; to gain free range and play for all specific differences, to find a theatre and occasion for exercise of the highest virtues, we need the widest organization of the human forces consistent with the laws of cohesion and self-direction. It is only by these radiating and reflected influences that the perfection of the individual and of the race can be achieved.

A great and free country is not merely defence and protection. For every earnest spirit, it is opportunity and inspiration. In its rich content and manifold resources, its bracing atmosphere of broad fellowship and friendly rivalry, impulse is given to every latent aptitude and special faculty. Meantime enlarged humanity reflects itself in every participant. The best of each being given to all, the best of all returns to each. So the greatness as well as the power of a country broadens every life and blesses every home. Hence it is that in questions of rank, of rights, and duties, Country must stand supreme.

The thought goes deeper. There is a mysterious law of our nature that, in this sense of membership and participation, the spirit rises to a magnitude commensurate with that of which it is part. The greatness of the whole passes into the consciousness of each ; the power of the whole seems to become the power of each, and the character of the whole is impressed upon each. The inspiration of a noble cause involving human interests wide and far, enables men to do things they did not dream themselves capable of before, and which they were not capable of alone. The consciousness of belonging, vitally, to some-

thing beyond individuality ; of being part of a personality that reaches we know not where, in space and in time, greatens the heart to the limits of the soul's ideal, and builds out the supreme of character.

It was something like this, I think, which marked our motive ; which made us strong to fight the bitter fight to the victorious end, and made us unvengeful and magnanimous in that victory.

We rose in soul above the things which even the Declaration of Independence pronounces the inalienable rights of human nature, for the securing of which governments are instituted among men. Happiness, liberty, life, we laid on the altar of offering, or committed to the furies of destruction, while our minds were lifted up to a great thought and our hearts swelled to its measure. We were beckoned on by the vision of destiny, we saw our Country moving forward, charged with the sacred trusts of man. We believed in its glorious career ; the power of high aims and of strong purpose ; the continuity of great endeavor ; the onward, upward path of history, to God. Every man felt that he gave himself to, and belonged to, something beyond time and above place,—something which could not die.

These are the reasons, not fixed in the form of things, but formative of things, reasons of the soul, why we fought for the Union. And this is the spirit in which having overcome the dark powers of denial and disintegration, having restored the people of the South to their place and privilege in the Union, and set on high the old flag telling of one life and one body, one freedom and one law, over all the people and all the land between the four great waters, we now come as it were home ; we look into each others eyes ; we speak in softer tones ; we gather under the atmosphere of these sacred thoughts and memories,—like the high, pure air that shines down upon us to-day, flooding these fields where cloud and flash and thunder-roll of battle enshrouded us and them in that great three-days' burial,—to celebrate this resurrection ; to rear on these far-away fields memorials of familiar names, and to honor the State whose honor it

was to rear such manhood, and keep such faith, that she might have part in far-away things.

But there are other reasons, more determinate and tangible, reasons embodied in positive forms, which are matters of knowledge and understanding. I have said that the issue brought upon us was a question of politics. Every one knows that I do not mean that this was a party question, as to what particular set of persons or policies should have control of the Government. And when I say that it was a political question, this is not saying that it was not also a moral question. For I do not think that politics and morals are so utterly alien and exclusive, one from the other, as some find it necessary to maintain. It is true that on one side politics is concerned with forms, methods, measures; and herein acts chiefly upon economic and tactical considerations. Still, all these must be conformable, or at least not alien, to the great constructive principle which holds to the motive and to the final cause of action.

Politics, I believe, is the organization of the human elements and powers for the promotion of right living, and to secure the noblest ends of living attainable in human character. It is, then, a domain which on its higher side takes cognizance not alone of rights, but of rightness, and of human worth, and of a nobleness which has a moral and divine ideal. The sphere of politics, therefore, is the highest range of thought and action, and the widest field of practical ethics set before the mind of man for its earthly career.

The issue before us, while having its ultimate ground in reason and great ethics, and the perfectibility of man, was practically, one of positive, public law. It was an issue, as we believed, to enforce the performance of constitutional obligations undertaken deliberately and freely, and under solemn pledges, as the expression of the deepest convictions of the mind and conscience of the people. If we were right, then there was such a being and power on this earth as the People of the United States of America. If we were wrong, then there was no such People, but a chaos of jarring elements and antagonizing interests. The forces ranged themselves across this line. It

became the test of what we call Loyalty. This was a positive, practical question. The test was sharp. The answer must be final.

That question has been answered: at the cost of toil and treasure, of blood and tears. The people have made themselves the expounders of their Constitution. The decision has been accepted by clear constitutional and legal enactment; confirmed by the supreme judicial tribunals of the land; and, we fervently trust, sealed by the benediction of the Most High. We are one People; and the law of its spirit is supreme over the law of its members.

But grave responsibilities come with great victory. The danger is not so much, I think, from renewed attacks of those who lost, as from the tendencies of power on the part of those who won. It should be distinctly borne in mind that we were not antagonizing the principle of local self-government. Our triumph was for all the people, and in full recognition of the value in our political system of recognizing local centers of influence and of government. The "lost cause" is not lost liberty and right of self-government. What is lost is slavery of men and supremacy of States.

It was necessary for us to save the Union. In the stress and sharpness of the conflict we were forced to strain to the utmost all the central powers of the Government, and leave it to the after wisdom of the People to restore the equilibrium of powers, to see to it that the abnormal necessities of war should not be made precedents for the law of life and growth. Necessity is a dangerous plea for the privilege of power; especially when the sole judge of it is the power pretending it. In times of peace, when the free faculties of the people are proceeding by natural and spiritual laws of growth, the powers of government should be jealously guarded, and its agents held close to the thought and purpose of the people. The national authority we have vindicated by the war, means in the last analysis that Congress is the sole judge of its own powers, and sole executor of its own will. This is a tremendous trust. God grant that it be ever exercised, not in willfulness of power nor by force of chance

majorities, nor to favor particular or partisan interests, but with the large and long look, and with the deep sense of constitutional obligation and of supreme trusts, for the common well-being.

To this end the place of the State in our political system is one of vital importance. The inter-action of local and national capacities is a peculiarity in our system, without parallel and but little understood in other lands, and liable to be too little regarded in our own. We make much account of checks and balances in the separation of the three Departments of the Government—Legislative, Executive and Judicial. A similar theory does not hold England from pressing steadily towards a concentration of power in the hands of her House of Commons, now practically absolute. We rely justly on the lines of division between State and National powers, a wisdom to which England has not yet attained, but of which the skillful recognition makes the strength of the German Empire of to-day, while the lack of it has held back the French Republic for a hundred years.

Local self-government alone could not have constructed this People, but without local self-government as an instrumentality in our representative system, neither Government nor people could hold together. The generative and formative forces are in the local centers. These vortexes of living energy, touching and interfusing, are rounded into oneness and bound together by the deep, central consciousness of mutual service and a common destiny. In the course of history, which we call the orderings of Providence, local traditions, sentiments, needs and aspirations have made up the strong composite character of this country. So long as the people of each decided local type and center feel that in the institutions, laws and policies of the great People shaping the larger life, their own freedom is secured; their own thoughts and interests are represented, they will feel bound together by the central attraction of a vital force, and no lesser influence nor lower impulse can tempt away their loyalty, patriotism and pride of partnership.

But it is not enough that the State is supreme in its sphere,

and that departments of government shall not encroach upon each other. Our strongest safeguard is in personal participation in the direction and destiny of the Nation. It is not the separation of spheres and offices in the administrative order, but the interpenetration of State and National capacities in the organic order. The political unit of organization is neither the individual nor the State; but the people of each State. The government is not an aristocracy, nor a plural monarchy. It is not administered in the interests of sections nor of classes; but the people of the several States, in their responsible character and mature convictions, acting through their respective political organizations, reach out to their larger boundaries and administer the great trusts of the Nation. Just as in the sphere and function of the States is the surest safeguard of liberty,—as those who are to make and execute the laws which affect the daily life and dearest interests are chosen from among citizens whom the people know, and can trust and can vouch for, so it is within the power of the same people acting yet through their State organizations, to see to it that in the election of Representatives, Senators and Presidents only such men are chosen as well understand the delicate articulations by which liberty is kept alive, who are brave to reverse the false maxim that the law cares not for the least but only for the great, and who represent not the mere will of a momentary majority, but the heart and conscience of the manifold people which make their vote the voice of God.

When the martyr President, standing on this hallowed ground at the consecration of this cemetery, uttered that noble climax of his immortal speech, "We here highly resolve that the government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth," he meant such a people as I have described. Surely he did not mean in this sublime utterance to justify the rule of mob majority, nor to furnish a watchword for revolutionists like those who a century ago in France knew not how to overthrow tyranny without overturning also the foundations of society human and divine, nor a pretext for the anarchists and dynamiters of to-day who in the name of the people would let

loose a riot of discordant and irresponsible individualism — a carnival of savage greed and frenzied passion.

He meant government ; he meant a people holding their liberty under law ; exercising their sovereignty by deliberation and delegation ; respecting its minorities ; checking its own caprice and facility of change ; relegating great questions to its sober second thought ; its consciousness alive in every part, but guided ever by great commanding convictions, and pressing forward as one for the goal of a common good.

Part and parcel of this political being of the people is this State of ours. As such she stood on these hills and slopes a generation ago, of the foremost of the people's defenders. Whether on the first, the second, or the third day's battle ; whether on the right, caught and cut to pieces by the great shears-blades of two suddenly enclosing hostile columns ; on the left, rolled back by a cyclone of unappeasable assault ; or on the center, dashed upon in an agony of desperation, terrible, sublime ; wherever there was a front, the guns of Maine thundered and her colors stood. And when the long, dense, surging fight was over, and the men who made and marked the line of honor were buried where they fell, the name of Maine ran along these crests and banks, from the Cavalry Fields, Wolf's Hill, Culp's Hill and the Seminary Ridge, down through the Cemetery, the Peach Orchard, the Wheat Field to the Devil's Den and the Round Top Crags — a blazonry of ennobled blood !

Now you have gathered these bodies here. You mark their names with head-stones, and compass them about with the cordon of the State's proud sorrow. You station them here, on the ground they held. Here they will remain, not buried but transfigured forms,— part of the earth they glorified,— part also of the glory that is to be.

No chemistry of frost or rain, no overlaying mould of the season's recurrent life and death, can ever separate from the soil of these consecrated fields the life-blood so deeply commingled and incorporate here. Ever henceforth under the rolling suns, when these hills are touched to splendor with the morning light, or smile a farewell to the lingering day, the flush that broods

upon them shall be rich with a strange and crimson tone,—not of the earth, nor yet of the sky, but mediator and hostage between the two.

But these monuments are not to commemorate the dead alone. Death was but the divine acceptance of life freely offered by every one. Service was the central fact. That fact, and that truth, these monuments commemorate. They mark the centers around which stood the manhood of Maine, steadfast in noble service,—to the uttermost, to the uppermost! Those who fell here—those who have fallen before or since—those who linger, yet a little longer, soon to follow; all are mustered in one great company on the shining heights of life, with that star of Maine's armorial ensign upon their foreheads forever—like the ranks of the galaxy.

In great deeds, something abides. On great fields, something stays. Forms change and pass; bodies disappear; but spirits linger, to consecrate ground for the vision-place of souls. And reverent men and women from afar, and generations that know us not and that we know not of, heart-drawn to see where and by whom great things were suffered and done for them, shall come to this deathless field, to ponder and dream; and lo! the shadow of a mighty presence shall wrap them in its bosom, and the power of the vision pass into their souls.

This is the great reward of service. To live, far out and on, in the life of others; this is the mystery of the Christ,—to give life's best for such high sake that it shall be found again unto life eternal.